



Representative **Al O'Brien**

2004 END OF SESSION REPORT TO THE 1st DISTRICT



April 2004

Dear neighbor,

The 2004 Legislative Session came to an end on time, and even though Olympia is a great town we're all happy to be back home.

I wish I could tell you that every good bill passed. Unfortunately many of the bills that would have made great differences died somewhere along the road. But we did make significant progress in some areas.

We started the session with three priorities:

- Investing in education;
- Making health care more affordable; and
- Creating good jobs with benefits.

I am pleased to say we did achieve many of our goals in these areas.

In this newsletter you'll find information on a few of the many pieces of legislation we addressed this year. Please take a couple of minutes to read this brief report.

As always, I am privileged to serve as your state representative. Please keep in mind that I am your representative all year-round, not just when the Legislature is in session. If you have questions about something the Legislature did this year, or you have any comments, please contact me. I welcome your input.

Sincerely,

Al O'Brien
State Representative
1st Legislative District



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Higher Education

Washington is 33rd out of 50 states in turning out students with four-year degrees. In 2008 we will have the largest high-school graduating class in state history, and we have to make more room for them. This session we addressed this issue and made conscientious investments in the budget to improve our higher education institutions:

- \$10 million to pay for 3,000 more enrollments at our colleges and universities
- \$2.3 million for more Promise Scholarships so students afford to attend college;
- \$7.1 million for high demand enrollments such as worker retraining programs, nursing, applied sciences and engineering, computing and information technology and special education, among other fields.
- \$300,000 for the Transition Math Project, which is aimed at reducing the need for remedial math courses at institutions of higher education.

Working with Sen. Rosemary McAuliffe, I was able to secure funding in the state capital budget for road improvements to the University of Washington in Bothell/Cascadia Community College. With this money we can now move forward to expand the capacity of higher education on this branch campus in Bothell.



Health Care

How much sense does it make to balance the budget on the backs of low-income family children? That's exactly what the Senate budget was proposing: to impose Medicaid premiums on low-income families. In short, this would have resulted in 20,000 children losing health coverage.

When a low-income family kid gets sick and doesn't receive timely medical attention, a chronic series of consequences follow:

- the child misses school
- the condition worsens
- the kid is taken to the emergency room
- the tag price ends up being higher and yes, we all have to pay for it

None of that has to take place, which is why this year we eliminated the proposed premium on the poorest children so that they can have access to health care. We also increased support for community clinics by \$2.5 million and boosted grants to hospitals by \$10 million, so they are partially compensated for treating the uninsured.



Jobs

This session we kept our commitment and boosted the creation of jobs through:

Small Business Incubators

We created the Small Business Incubator (SBI) Program to assist companies in economically distressed or disadvantaged areas.

Small-business incubators are proven tools in promoting economic development. SBIs provide hands-on management help, access to financing, and technical support. They work with small businesses to obtain office space, equipment, and flexible leases. The program involves companies in manufacturing, technology and other industries. Companies that receive this kind of assistance have a success rate of more than 80 percent, and can cut their startup cost in half.

Through the creation of new businesses, we create more jobs.

Tax Incentives

Targeted and accountable tax incentives can certainly improve the state's economic development. This year we passed legislation to give tax breaks to high-tech companies and research and development activities, because they both create good jobs for Washington workers.

But keep in mind this is no freebie. Accountability is a fundamental component in this measure. We want to make sure the incentives are actually doing the job: strengthening businesses *and* putting people to work here.

Fighting the Off-shoring trend

You probably remember when factory jobs began vanishing from our map, only to pop up somewhere overseas. Our TV sets had to cross an ocean to reach us,

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but it was cheap labor and for a while nobody seemed too concerned.

Things have changed. Now it's not just about building televisions in Asia and Latin America. Today professional jobs like computer programming and accounting are getting shipped to faraway lands.

How much money are we really saving on this so-called cheap labor if we're losing our family jobs? The off-shoring of traditional American jobs is threatening to wipe out our middle class.

This session the House passed a bill that would have taken a close look at just how much off-shoring is taking place in this state, who benefits and who suffers from this practice. Its intent was to limit the amount of work that goes overseas so that we can protect American workers. Unfortunately, the bill died in the Senate.

Addressing the Prison Labor Issue

I worked hard during the session to bring together representatives from business and labor to work on the reduction of prison labor in Washington state.

Prison labor has been a problem for business, especially small business, for years. In an effort to protect jobs for men and women in our labor force, we were able to work out a system so that:

- prison labor cannot compete unfairly with private businesses; and
- prison labor cannot do work in our communities that will displace members of our labor force.



Other Important Issues

Fighting Sex Crimes

I worked across the isle with House Republicans, and with Senate Democrats and Republicans, to toughen the laws that deal with sex offenders who prey on children. Together, we strengthened current law so that these sex offenders are held accountable, while victims are safer.

Domestic violence

This year we passed legislation that will require all general law enforcement agencies to develop or adopt policies on domestic violence committed by peace officers. This legislation came about because of the murder of Crystal Brame by her husband, David Brame, who at the time of the incident was the Chief of Police in Tacoma.

And we also increased funding by \$2 million, in the supplemental budget, for domestic violence programs throughout the state.

The 2004 Supplemental Budget

We passed a bipartisan, carefully-crafted adjustment to the biennial budget, which restored some of the deep cuts to the health safety net, invested in higher education, job creation and environmental programs – with no new taxes, and \$300 million in reserve.



A new primary for Washington

In February the Federal Court ruled that our 70 year old “blanket primary” was unconstitutional.

After many drafts and long debates, the Legislature passed the “top two” qualifying primary. Under this system, voters can vote for any candidate, in any race on the primary ballot regardless of political party, and the two candidates with the most votes move on to the November General Election. No party registration is required or recorded.

I disagreed with the majority regarding this “top two” primary, and so I voted “No”. There are a couple of reasons why I voted this way:

First, the “top two” primary will eliminate the ability of minor party candidates to get on the General Election ballot. Thus, this form of primary disenfranchises



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